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PM-Fund

PM LAUNCHES TRUST FUND FOR BAKUN RESIDENTS

SIBU, Aug 7 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad tonight launched a trust fund to provide assistance to Bakun residents who will be relocated to facilitate the construction of the hydroelectric dam project there.

The Tabung Amanah Bakun, operated by the Sarawak Foundation, received contributions totalling RM15 million immediately after its launch, with the federal government, Sarawak government and Bakun Hydro Electric Corporation (BHEC) giving RM5 million each.

BHEC is the main developer of the RM13.5 billion project.

Dr Mahathir, in his speech, said this was the first time in the world that a fund had been set up to help residents affected by an hydroelectric project.

"We thought of the problems faced by the residents of Bakun and decided to set up the Tabung Amanah Bakun to help Bakun residents who want development," he said.

Dr Mahathir said all elected representatives in Sarawak who had the backing of the people of the state supported the move to implement the Bakun hydroelectric project.

He said foreigners who opposed the project were only thinking of their own welfare.

The Prime Minister also said once the project was implemented, power failures such as the massive one experienced in Peninsular Malaysia last weekend would not happen anymore.

He said he was informed by Tenaga Nasional Berhad that frequent power failures take place in the country because almost 60 per cent of its power needs were generated using gas turbine.

The federal government's contribution was handed over by Dr Mahathir, the Sarawak government's by Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud and BHEC's by its director Tan Sri Bujang Mohd Noor.

A board member of the fund, Datuk Nyipa Bato, received the contributions. He is the assemblyman for Belaga, where the project is being implemented.

The fund, under the chairmanship of Deputy State Secretary Datuk Taha Ariffin, will provide employment opportunities to about 9,500 people who will be resettled in a new township with better education and commercial facilities.

Other members of the fund's board are Sarawak Assistant Tourism Minister Dr James Jemut Masing, Hulu Rejang member of parliament Billy Abit Joo and state Social Development Ministry permanent secretary Dr Hatta Solhee. -- BERNAMA